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Statistics by the Crop Reporting Service show that Texas sheep outfits have declined 1000 in number in the past two years. Only 14,000 operations are left.

Predatory animals have really put us sheep herders on the run. Coyotes, cats, and eagles have had bountiful years. The infestation is cutting off big chunks of the county every year. It appears that the nature clubs are going to have their victory balls way ahead of schedule.

Our image must be at an all time low. Art galleries or exhibits aren't displaying the tender pastoral scenes anymore. I suppose that artist don't want to be rapped across the nose with a parasol any more than a herder does. Pioneers dreaded arrow points: nowadays, we don't know whether we are going to succumb to a hat pin or be ambushed in a supermarket.

What really worries me is what's going to happen to the 1000 head of herders that are wandering around the countryside. Some of them, I guess are making their living from cattle, but not all of the country will run more than enough cows to cause trouble.

About all sheep wrangling teaches a man to do is to patch shearing boards and doctor sick ewes. Those two fields are limited, and as a sheep disappear, they'll get scarcer.

As for myself, I've been dickering with the idea of using the piano moving business as a backup. Last summer an old boy in that games stopped on the highway through the ranch. He said that as long as he stayed away from the cities, he didn't find over one or two jobs a year. Old King Cole on his best days wasn't as happy as this hombre appeared to be.

Make fun if you want to, but piano movers don't have to worry about a lot of things that sheepman do. Nature clubs don't burn their images every night of the year, nor do the sheep shearers have a hold on them that'd make a wrestler think he'd lost his grip.

The way this fellow was set up with his moving business, he couldn't get hurt. If a bunch of music teachers settled in his district, he could move on down the road to a less musically inclined community. He could keep on going until he found a place that favored, say, slide trombones, and never be in a bind.

Another deal I've considered to go along with moving pianos is trapping. The far future looks good for leather britches and leather pants. Something is going to have to replace wool and mohair when they are gone. The Founding Fathers, you know, used a lot of hides in their clothes. (The old grannies had looms, but like these newer model wives, they weren't against letting the looms cool off.)

Trapping and piano moving would work well together. In the winter, skinning skunks wouldn't interfere with going indoors to pick up pianos, because that end of the business

would be slow. In the summer a man could get something to kill the skunk smell and get right after his other work.

Life would be good, wandering around, exempt from taxes and immune to the responsibility of raising food. Nature lovers could raise all the hell they wanted to, but they couldn't kill both of your games at the same time.

I can't imagine the Shortgrass Country without any sheep. They have saved us so many times, it's impossible to believe that a group of city folks living in a fairyland can destroy such an important industry. The balancing of nature may not look so great on an empty stomach. Aren't there any of them anywhere who realize that the food the varmints are eating belongs to them?